

97-84059-21

James, William

The moral responsibility of
the American nation

Rochester [N.Y.]

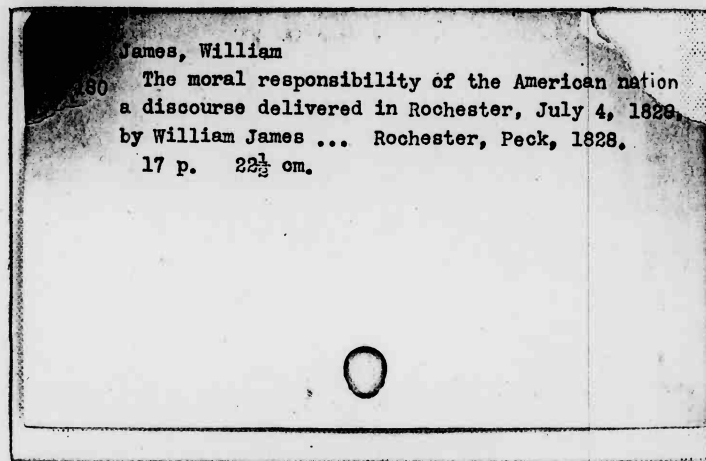
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The moral responsibility of the American nation

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THE

MORAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE AMERICAN NATION :

DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED IN ROCHESTER, JULY 4, 1828.

BY WILLIAM JAMES,

PASTOR OF THE BRICK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

ROCHESTER:
PRINTED BY E. PECK & CO.
1828.

DISCOURSE.

DEUT. XIV. 2.

And the Lord hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all nations that are upon the earth.

THE highest attribute of man is Responsibility. Though he dwells in a house of clay, and in this sense is hardly superiour to the worm, yet his moral influence is felt over a sphere of being, wider than the dominions of the sun. Physically considered, his origin is dust, his nature a flower, his date a span; and his entire action of no more account than the swelling and bursting of a bubble. But view him as invested with the attribute of Responsibility, survey his actions in their remote consequences, as affecting the moral character, and consequently the immortal destinies of a multitude of other beings, in addition to his own, and how important is the agency of man!—still having this resemblance to the bubble, which, though nothing in itself, yet as it bursts upon the bosom of the quiet ocean, creates a circle around it, and that another, and that another, till it reaches the extremities of space.

But the highest conception which can be formed of human power, or of the importance of human action, is that which arises from viewing man in his associated capacity, attaching the attribute of moral responsibility to the character of a whole nation: in other words, viewing a myriad of minds as constituting one individual being, and that being, responsible to God for its actions, as affecting the character and interests of an interminable posterity. We believe there is a feeling in this audience, which will protect us from the reproach of enthusiasm, if we make this conception the platform of the present discourse. More distinctly, then, the subject to which your attention is invited, is, THE MORAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE AMERICAN NATION, as chosen of God to be a peculiar people to himself, above all the nations of the earth; that is, as we shall endeavour to show, *a people who have received, through the agency of a special Providence, and the influence of religious truth, a richer inheritance of social blessings, than has fallen to the lot of any modern nation—whereby they are invested with a power to affect incalculably the interests of unborn generations.*

A part of the truth contained in this proposition, is incontestible. None at least of those who hear me will be disposed to question, that this country has been pre-eminently distinguished, in whatever is necessary to national felicity and glory. It is not the place here to detail our particular

advantages, but only to observe, that they are so unparalleled in the experience of other countries, that nothing has yet been suggested to our disadvantage, even by our jealous rivals and our bitter foes, but this:—Your privileges are too great to last; your happiness is too abundant to be of long duration; it resembles too much the fable of the golden age, to prove permanent. Our uncommon privileges then, as a nation, being admitted even by our enemies, the special question to be considered here, as rather requiring your attention, is, How did we derive them? To what causes have we been indebted for our national existence, and our subsequent unexampled prosperity? As, according to the ancient Epicureans, the world arose out of a fortuitous combination of atoms, so it would probably agree with modern infidelity to suppose that our nation was the result of a fortuitous concurrence of individuals. But we believe with the Scriptures, that God has made all the nations that dwell upon the face of the earth, and hath appointed beforehand the bounds of their habitation; that it is He who sitteth on the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers, amongst whom he doeth whatsoever it pleaseth him. And it hath pleased him to make a vast and mysterious difference. Some he has left to walk in their own ways, and they have gone after idols who could neither hear nor save them. Others, he has chosen and guarded as his peculiar treasure, nourished and brought them up as children, instructed and kept them as the apple of his eye; finding them, perhaps, in the lowest and most hopeless condition, he has rode upon the sky for their deliverance; he has led them through fire and through water to a city of habitation; for their sakes he has cast out other nations greater and mightier than themselves; he has increased them when they were few in number, borne them as upon eagle's wings, and made them to tread upon high places. Such a favoured and exalted nation were the ancient Jews; and such we shall undertake to show, by the clearest indications, is the land of our birth and our affection—that it is, to the agency of a special Providence, and to the direct influence of religious truth, that she owes her existence, and all her peculiar prosperity as a nation.

In the first place, let us look at the agency of *Providence*; upon which, as it is not our principal distinction, we shall be intentionally brief.

Although the manner in which Providence governs the world, is such as for the most part to hide his immediate agency, yet there are not a few instances, in the history both of nations and individuals, in which that agency is much more immediate, and much more conspicuous, than it is in the general succession of events. These we call instances of a *special* providence; and we lay it down as a proof of the particular favour of the Almighty, when in the history either of a nation or an individual, such instances are frequent and striking. We do not refer to the case of mira-

cles; for they suppose the *entire absence* of human agencies and moral causes; but we refer to cases, in which, by a wonderful conjunction of moral causes, or by a felicitous combination of human agencies, events have been brought about, more speedily or more happily, than human foresight or calculation would have looked for. As for example, when an enterprise, which was commenced under great difficulties, and with a slender prospect of success, through the intervention of circumstances not foreseen at the beginning, has entirely changed its aspect; or, where certain means, which have been used a thousand times, without any remarkable success, and perhaps with absolute failure, through some invisible influence,—we can define it by no other term than the blessing of Providence—have been followed with the most amazing results. Now shall we not be joined by every man of intelligence, when we assert that this is one of the most distinctive traits of American history. The conquests of other nations have been achieved with their bow and with their sword. Generally speaking, the race has been to the swift, and the battle to the strong. But how different has been the case with our own country, ask your fathers and they will show you—your elders and they will tell you; and when you have heard, how they were odious for their principles, and contemptible for their numbers, how they sojourned in a land of deserts and of savages, and how, whilst they were yet the fewest and most scattered of people, they sustained a triumphant conflict against the mightiest empire of the globe; when you have considered the lowness of their origin, the trials of their pilgrimage, the poverty of their means, and the shortness of the period in which this great continent has been settled, subdued, and planted with the most perfect governments, the purest religious institutions, and the happiest societies the world ever saw—can you refrain from adopting the language of Jewish acknowledgement, “We got not the land by our own sword, neither did our own arm save us; but thy right hand, and thy arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto us.”

But we have not been so much indebted to the agency of Providence, assisting ordinary means, as to the direct influence of *religious truth*. A single passage of scripture is sufficient to show, that this is an influence which none enjoy, but by the discriminating favour of the Almighty. “He hath shown his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgements unto Israel; he hath not dealt so with any nation, and as for his judgements they have not known them.” Now here is the great moral cause, to which we may trace all that is peculiar, in our history or our prospects. In taking a survey of the nations of the earth, you will find that nearly all of them have had their origin in the worst principles which can influence the nature of man—in the lust of carnage, rapine, and glory. A few may have had their beginning in commercial speculation, or in the natural desire for wealth; and

about as few, in the natural desire for independence, or for physical freedom. But they all may be referred to one principle; that principle has been the hope of improving their *temporal economy*; either of attaining a state of ease, of enlarging their sphere of enterprise, or of acquiring dominion and glory. To this principle, we know but two exceptions in the history of nations; these are, the pilgrims of Canaan, and the pilgrims of New-England—the bond-men of Egypt, and the bond-men of modern Britain. These are the only people who have had mainly in view, not the improvement of their temporal economy, but the enlargement of their moral rights, and the security of their moral interests. We speak here of the views of their leaders—the men who moulded their constitution and governed their society. Their views were, to the glory of God and the good of man; their object was to establish a policy, under which the truths of Divine revelation should not only be tolerated, but of which they should be made the living soul. The very design of their association was to secure moral benefits; acting upon the great principle, of seeking first the kingdom of heaven, and looking for ease, and wealth, and glory, in short, for all temporal and economical advantages, no farther, than as these should naturally result from the appended promise. And hence, whilst other communities have been spending their strength in accumulating treasure, or spending their treasure in the gratification of vanity and ambition, our fathers spared neither strength nor treasure, in providing for the religious cultivation of their children. This was their whole policy—simple enough to the view of worldly wisdom; but simple as it is, it is the moral cause, to which, as set in operation by the Great Disposer of events, we are indebted for all the rights and blessings which we commemorate this day.

A brief inquiry into the nature of these rights and blessings, will show the ground of this assertion.

What is it then, that distinguishes an American? Wherein are we better conditioned than the other nations of the earth? Are we higher favourites of NATURE? Have we a finer sky, a more salubrious atmosphere, a healthier tone of animal life, or a rosier-checked offspring? Have we a larger or a more fertile territory, or are the means of subsistence more plentiful? Has nature been more bountiful to us in these respects than to the hordes of Russia, or even to the paupers of Ireland?

And while nature has not been more liberal to this country than to some others, have her blessings been better economised? In other words, have we experienced in a higher degree, the influence of CIVILIZATION, or do we understand better the qualifying processes of art? If any should pretend to this, well might the European ask, Where are your specimens? Where are your fabricks, whether of wool or iron; your models, either the vast

or the elegant; your displays, either in mechanism or manners, which indicate the acme of civilization? and unless we affect them ourselves, if he has the eye of a philosopher, we need not apprehend his scorn. No, when he surveys the immensity of our country, and considers the provision which nature has made in the very amplitude of her blessings, for the want of this nice economy in using them; and then looking down the vale of time, when he sees the majestic elevation, which, if faithful to our moral interests, we are destined to assume amongst the nations, with so much to inspire and to enlarge, he would rather wonder, how the soul of an American could be broken down to that habit of ignoble earthly drudgery, which distinguishes the artizans of the old continent; or how, as a people, we could endure those impositions of unnatural and little-hearted custom, which create and rule the higher ranks of European society; and if he should witness an attempt to introduce into this country, the effeminating arts and usages of the eastern world, his language would be, Foolish men! you have mistaken your interest, if not your capacity: both nature and religion summon you to a higher calling; your work is to reform the nations, not to imitate them—not to contaminate your soil with the importation of their worn out vices, but to purify theirs by the exhibition of your original virtues; ransomed and regenerated by the spirit of freedom, they look to you for a new illustration of manhood—for deeds of moral greatness, not the little achievements of manual skill, nor the sickly affectation of their social refinements. *Let the dead bury their dead*—but wing your way to a nobler destiny.

Inferiour then, as it must be confessed we are, to the old countries in the arts of civilization, we proceed to inquire, does our distinction consist in a superiority of POLITICAL power—in wealth, numbers, and territorial dominion? Would we compare our commerce and revenues with those of Britain, our armies with the French and Austrian, or our dominions with Russia? We have indeed the name of a powerful nation; and high and swelling will be the words of vanity, with which many of our patriot orators will set off our martial achievements upon this anniversary. But whilst we acknowledge that the deeds of our nation have been glorious, it is important to remember, that they were performed in reliance upon the protection of God; and upon the moral, not upon the martial spirit of our countrymen. Here is a great distinction with which our children especially ought to be impressed; that is, that it is not in a *martial*, but only in a *moral* sense that we are a powerful nation; that whilst we are great indeed, yet our greatness is wholly of another order from that of Greece and Rome, or of France and England. Upon this we shall be larger presently.

Once more we ask, Does our distinction from other nations consist in INTELLECTUAL superiority—in a greater development of the powers of

genius and taste—in a higher capacity for science and the arts? In this, you know, was founded the renown of Athens, over the nations of antiquity; and of Italy during the middle ages. But is this ours? Will it be pretended that the mantle of poetick or philosophick inspiration has fallen upon us? Where are our lyceums, our museums, our universities, or our libraries? How many of our illustrious names have had a place assigned them in “that temple where the dead are honoured by the nations?” And of the living age, where are the scholars, the poets, the artists, or even the schoolmasters, who can vie in their respective professions, with those of the elder continent? No, my countrymen: our highest praise as to this article should be, that we know enough to be sensible of our ignorance; and that we know enough to feel the vanity of mere science, for the higher ends of our existence. This should be our praise; and would to heaven we were fully deserving of it. But whence that resentment which is felt by our reading population toward the reviewers of Britain, for their low appreciation of our national literature? Whence this feeling, unless that literature is the matter of our pride? You tell me their observations are malignant, and are intended to annoy. Admit it—they should fall like a pebble on the shield of Achilles. These, and all the other things which have been mentioned, do the nations of the world seek after; and our Father knoweth how far we have need of them, and so far they have not been withheld; whilst in addition to them, he has given us the great blessing, which comprehends all beyond—all that is distinguishing in the name and the inheritance of an American.

Once more then, we ask, wherein are we better conditioned than the other nations of the earth? Some of them enjoy as largely the provisions of nature; some have experienced in a higher degree the influence of civilization; few of them are inferior in martial power; and many of them are entitled to an equal, and a higher fame, in the pursuits of pure intellect. Probably, there is no one nation, which combines these several advantages as happily as our own. But admitting this, still it does not make our generic distinction. Though even upon this admission we might claim a very high place amongst the nations, still it does not prove us of a different order—it does not prove us a *peculiar* people. Let us add then, that to all our other advantages, we unite the first and grand privilege of man; we mean SELF-GOVERNMENT. That you may see at a glance, the whole effect of this additional privilege, we observe, that it makes a man a lord, who would otherwise be a slave; it gives him an interest of his own, who before was but a servant to the interests of others. It dignifies and enriches every individual of a nation, when without it, ninety-nine hundredths, or even a still greater proportion, would be mere contributors to the dignity and riches of the remainder. To make this thought

a little clearer, let it be observed, that in all the old countries there are just two classes of men, the governours and the governed. What distinguishes the former, is not any badge of office, but that they possess all the property of the country—all the growth of its soil, and all the labour of its animals and men, are theirs by natural inheritance. What distinguishes the other class, who yet may form ninety-nine hundredths of the whole is, that they own nothing, not even their own labour—for how far their labour shall avail them, whether it shall suffice for their food and clothing, or whether they shall go naked and starve, depends on laws, with the enactment of which they have no more to do than with the ordinances of day and night. The design of all these laws is, briefly, to advance the peculiar interests of the governing classes, and to make the labour of the people serviceable to those interests; or still more briefly, to prevent the people from attaining the capacity and the privilege of self-government. This is the real object, either direct or indirect, of all the old systems, just in so far as they are true to themselves, to depress the mass of the people, in their temporal and economical circumstances—to prevent them, though it be by force, from accumulating property, from holding assemblies, from manifesting their opinions, and in short, from every privilege by which a people thrive. To fill their mouths, and make them serviceable to the national aggrandisement, and keep them tolerably quiet, whilst their betters are enjoying their leisure or their dignity, this is the utmost that is expected from their political provisions; and this they attain, but only at a sacrifice of the most important advantages, for which governments are constituted. For, beside the immense miseries which such provisions entail upon the people at large, the trouble and the expense of carrying them into effect, have proved an intolerable burthen to the governing classes themselves; and hence the state as a whole, instead of going forward in strength and happiness, has found full occupation with keeping itself in repair—with preventing one part of the system from infringing upon another, and the whole from becoming a wreck. Now, just the reverse of this condition is ours. It is not the interest of our government, that a single individual of the body should be depressed. It gives them all the same unlimited freedom for acquiring and holding wealth—a freedom, limited only by the moral law; it indulges them all in the same unqualified privilege of expressing their convictions, in matters both political and religious—a privilege, qualified by nothing, in the shape either of a penalty or a bribe; and it allows to all, the same proportion of power in determining the publick counsels and measures of the nation; and for all these immunities, there is no exaction which any one feels to be a burthen, and from all this unbounded freedom, no one apprehends the least insecurity.

Such are our privileges. In addition to all the lower faculties of a nation, as the gifts of nature, the arts of civilization, martial and intellectual ability, which we possess, if not in a greater measure of each, yet in a better proportioned composition, perhaps, than any other people; in addition to this, we have in our civil constitution, a spirit of freedom, which throws into all these lower faculties, the dignity and energy of a living soul. Such are American privileges; now let us look at the result of them, as it appears in American power. We have the name of being the greatest and most powerful of nations: let us understand in what this power consists.

The power of every government consists in two things; in its means of self-defence, and in its means of influence over foreign nations. The ordinary means both of defence and influence are, wealth, numbers, and military discipline. In these, therefore, lie *national power*, as we apply the phrase to the nations of the eastern continent. But this is not ours; with the most scattered population, and the most extended seaboard on the face of the globe, we have neither the armies, the fortifications, nor the treasures of our competitors. Wherein then consists our capacity of self-defence? In the love of freedom—in the resolve *never to be slaves*—in the spirit of our fathers, which we inherit with their blood, and in which, appealing to heaven for the rectitude of their intentions, they pledged “their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honours.” We have a treasure, an army, and a fortification in the breast of every undegenerate American, which may bid defiance to any array of physical power. And by this time the tyrants of the earth know it; and however they may interrupt our commerce, and perhaps annoy our seaboard, never, whilst we have the spirit of our fathers, will they think to abolish our institutions, or to exact a tribute from our soil, any more than of overrunning the moon, or of demanding homage from the ocean.

Our means for affecting the interests of foreign nations are of a similar character. The public mind of all those nations, as you will easily gather from what was so recently said, is strongly setting to revolution. A feeling has begun to rise, on the tide of which, the whole civilized earth is bearing upward to the high prerogative of self-government. Of all the causes which have conduced to the creation of this feeling, none have been half so powerful as the moral example of the American people—a people who can govern themselves without anarchy and without division. This is the report which has loosed the loins of kings, and shaken their foundations. If they should hear that we were coming against them with all the forces which our continent could muster, they would have us in derision. They have little more dread of our physical power, than we should have of their imperial decrees. But our very name, operating as it does

like inspiration upon the energies of their subjects, creates an uneasiness in royal bosoms, like the vision of Belshazzar; and vainly, like him, do they call upon their magicians. “The matter is by the decree of the watchers,” that if we are but faithful to the interests of freedom, their kingdoms are numbered and finished; American principle shall overrun Europe more widely and destructively to reigning dynasties than the arms of Napoleon.

And our power will not end here. Having taught them the first right and interest of manhood, to us will the nations look for every lesson in the art of human amelioration and improvement. Freedom, it should never be forgotten, while it is the hardest of all blessings to obtain, so it is the most difficult to preserve, and it becomes the most deadly evil when abused. As a son to its mother, so is freedom to the nations. Brought forth with anguish, it must not only be cherished with affection—it must be followed with anxiety, it must be governed by discretion, it must be trained to understanding, to gentleness, and to all goodness, or it will bring them down with sorrow to their grave. The most melancholy passages in the history of nations, are those which record their abuse of freedom; either, their not carrying out the principle to the utmost good which it was capable of effecting, or their perverting it into an instrument of tremendous evil. In exercising a proper concern upon this subject, lies the whole responsibility of an American; and in the fact, that not one-fiftieth part of our nation are awake to its importance, lies all our danger. They are living upon the precious legacy which they have received from their fathers, as if no account were to be given of its improvement, or as if no use could be made of it for the farther amelioration of their kind. With a power which might command the destinies of Time, (and were it not for that moral apathy which will resist the conception as a hyperbole, we would add of eternity,) their minds are slow to expatiate beyond the sphere of their individual interests. But my countrymen, if this is to be the spirit of the nation, she is undone—not only as to any exalted influence upon the character of other countries, but also as to the perpetuity of her own. Reflect, for a moment, upon the nature of that privilege, which is our peculiar distinction as a nation. What is freedom? In an individual, it is *the power of doing as he pleases*; in a nation, it is the same. Its whole effect upon the former, is to make him an efficient and responsible agent, within the limits of individual capacity; but whether he shall be wise and virtuous, or whether his agency shall be a blessing or a curse, depends on his moral purposes and conduct. Freedom in a nation, is a blessing with similar qualifications. It is an immense power, with no provision for its useful, and no check upon its most licentious action, but that which is formed by the moral feeling of the community. Whilst it creates an obligation to deeds of unmeasured greatness,

it proposes no barrier, but (as human nature ever has been) a shorter and easier egress to weakness, violence and crime. The destinies of America then, depend at last on the unanimity and the magnanimity of her people. We must have *one* mind, and that a *great* one. Unparalleled privileges must lead to exalted achievements. Having ransomed the nations by our blood, we must also regenerate them by our example. To this we were chosen; and if we rest till our warfare is accomplished, if we stop in the career of improvement, if satisfied with our ancestral glory, we cease to emulate its rigid virtue—until our soil is purified from the despotick usages, the infidel opinions, the martial aspirings, and the moral abominations of the eastern hemisphere—until the wrongs of Africa are redressed—until the sink of intemperance has been purged—until the Sabbath of God is revered; in a word, until the Christian religion, which is the source of all our blessings, has become the model of our character as a nation—then, we shall continue to breathe the atmosphere of freedom, only to die at last by its pestilential exhalations; and other countries, unless distinguished by a still higher election of grace, will perish by the example which should have saved them. “The matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones; to the intent that the living may know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth over it the basest of men.”

We sum up all your responsibility as being comprehended in acting upon the policy of your fathers; the policy to which, as was observed at the beginning, we are indebted for all the rights and blessings we this day commemorate. The principles which made such a nation, alone can preserve it; and they all may be reduced to two.

In the first place, *we must provide for the formation of a VIRTUOUS AND INTELLIGENT PEOPLE, OR A PEOPLE CAPABLE OF SELF-GOVERNMENT.* The neglect of such a provision, is the capital error of all the old systems. A people capable of self-government, has always been regarded as a chimera; and hence the means which were necessary to make them and to keep them so, have been about the least part of a nation's concern. By an *intelligent* people, we do not mean scholars, artists, naturalists, or politicians. *They* can thrive as well in the regions of mental servitude. Commit your freedom to men of whom *this* is the principal distinction, and they will sell it for a post of honour, for a bag of gold, or for a meal of victuals. We do not want that superiour order of *worms*, whose business is to compute the dimensions of the stars, or analyse the qualities of matter, or discuss the mysteries of finance. These are but the lesser actions of intelligence, the recreations of Mind, or at best, a useful drudgery to which it sometimes condescends; they are not its high and natural avocation—

they exercise only the lighter and the lower faculties—they are not of the nature of wisdom. We want that superiour order of MEN, let them wear the gown of the professor or the apron of the mechanick, who contemplate truth in the light of *immortality*; whose understandings are subject to the dictates of *responsibility*; whose principal study is that of *moral* relations, and whose lives are a system of moral *action*. These are the men, who, placed in any circumstances will adorn their nature, and serve their species. These are the useful members of society, civil, domestic and religious; equally fit for the blessings of a temporal economy, and the rewards of a heavenly crown. These are the *virtuous and intelligent people*, who must govern our nation, if we would make our nation the strongest, the happiest, and the most perpetual.

In the second place, *we must, as a nation, ACKNOWLEDGE GOD, AND MAKE HIM OUR FEAR AND OUR CONFIDENCE.* Though we hear, and not without some sensible effect, that “all flesh is grass,” yet there are few who have as lively a perception of the agency by which it is withered. “Because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it,” is not a sufficient reason to the most, for the decline and fall of nations. An individual indeed, severed from the care of the Almighty, or like Cain, upheld only as to his physical existence, is an object of painful interest, and not of very difficult conception. But we are slow to apprehend the higher movements of Providence. In time which has passed, we survey only a “troubled sea,” spread over with the wrecks and vestiges of glory, which history ascribes to the passions of men—Scripture to the judgements of God. Not that as believers in Scripture, we have any reluctance in admitting the influence of moral causes upon the downward destiny of nations, if it will be but allowed on the other hand, that a practical atheism is the cause of causes: our doctrine, in brief, is, *that the pride, whether in societies or individuals, which affects self-protection, is in every instance the forerunner of destruction; that nations in particular, as they lose their reverence for religious truth, and confide in the native sympathies of the human mind, in its intelligence, and its sense of interest, slide from the only basis of social virtue, and thus become ripe for vengeance.* For an example of the principle, we refer you to the Gentile nations. Here were a people “who did not like to retain God in their knowledge;” and what remained to them of the social virtues? Read the first chapter of the epistle to the Romans, and remember that it was, after they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, that they were “given up” to every moral abomination, and every temporal evil. Look again at modern France; here was another people who were for discarding the religious virtues; renouncing their hope in God, they trusted the prosperity of the state to the influence of intelligence, mutual interest, and native philanthropy—and I ask, did ever the

cannibals of the southern zone, did ever the panthers and hyenas of the forest, exhibit less of political capacity, or more of brutal degradation than these worshippers of nature?

No, my countrymen, the truth cannot be softened, the declaration cannot be qualified, that our destinies as well as our privileges are from the hand of God; and according to our improvement of the one, shall be the character and measure of the other. There are very few but are ready to admit, that it is the effect of immorality to produce misery, and of national immorality to produce national misery; and hence, if we should augur no other evil to our country from neglecting her moral obligations, than what naturally arises from publick immorality—if in contemplating her future destinies, we should keep out of view the retributive and irresistible agency of Omnipotence, the argument would be popular. But what reason could we have for doing this? Were the Jews the only people, in whose destinies the purposes of God were concerned, and his power displayed? Who called the ravenous bird from the east, and the man to execute his counsel from a far country; who gave the nations before him, and made him rule over kings; who gave them as the dust to his sword, and as driven stubble to his bow; who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the Lord, the first and the last, I am he. At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them. And agreeably to this representation, you will find that the providence of God is just as strongly asserted in the destinies of Egypt, and Canaan, and Assyria, and all the then existing nations, as it was in the destinies of the Jewish people; that it was he who made the diviners of Egypt mad, and turned their wise men backward, and made their knowledge foolish, so that with all their wisdom they could not avert the day of their calamity; it was he who kept back the destruction of the Canaanites, only because their iniquities were not yet full; who said to Babylon, thou shalt no more be called the lady of kingdoms, because she was given to pleasure and dwelt carelessly; who stretched his hand over the sea, and destroyed Tyre, the crowning city, whose merchants were princes, and her traffickers the honourable of the earth; who sent among the Gentiles strong delusions, and gave them up to all manner of moral abominations and temporal evils, because they did not like to retain God in their knowledge; and if from what has been, we turn our eye to what shall be, and contemplate in the glass of prophecy the future destinies of the world, we shall find only a continued proof that the most High ruleth in the kingdoms of men, and doeth among them whatsoever he will; that all the revolutions of the earth, are but the move-

ments of his omnipotence; that all the distresses and perplexities of nations are but the penal recompense for disowning the Divine authority, and slighting the Divine goodness—the burstings of providential malediction upon a people whose character is not conformed to their privileges—the day of perplexity, and troubling, and treading down by the God of armies, in the valley of vision.

And what is so plain from Scripture, is as plain also from the *reason* of the case. For, admitting that the distresses of nations may be traced immediately to the operation of certain moral causes or human agencies, such as avarice, luxury, vain-glory, or bad policy; yet where, we would ask, is the power which sets that train of moral causes and human agencies in *fatal operation*? Let us illustrate our meaning. Avarice was probably the ruling principle of Egyptian policy; but who stirred up that principle to the fatal exploit, which overwhelmed Pharaoh and his people with ruin? It was the judgement of their obduracy. The moral causes which ultimately destroyed the power and the prosperity of Egypt, had been in existence long before; but God had restrained their operation; in his providence he had preserved the nation from just that juncture of evil circumstances, which was necessary to bring out their wickedness into full and final effect. But now upon their refusing to hear his voice, he left them to their pride—he pronounced his malediction—and in a moment, this giant among the nations sunk like lead amidst the mighty waters. And such, without any qualification, is the process in every case of a nation's calamities. The heart of the king is in the hands of the Lord, and the hearts of the people are in the hands of the Lord, and he turneth them as the rivers of water are turned. As to moral causes, such as the folly and incapacity of rulers, and the ignorance, vanity and violence of the people, there are enough of these elements in the wisest and strongest community on earth, to lay it waste at once; all that they need is the judgement of the Almighty to kindle them into fury; and when once this has been provoked by the impiety of a people, vain are all the combinations of human skill—all the advantages of position and circumstance—the men of might cannot find their hands; he taketh the wise in their own craftiness, and the counsel of the lofty is carried headlong; he looseth the loins of kings, he breaketh in pieces the gates of brass, and cutteth asunder the bars of iron; he forms the light and creates darkness, he makes peace and creates evil; he, the Lord, does all these things, and wo to him that striveth with his Maker.

If the present were some awful crisis in the history of our country, if we were upon the eve of some terrible inward convulsion, or engaged in a war with some foreign power which proved stronger than ourselves, the statements of this discourse would be tenfold more impressive than they are

now. It is prosperity that blinds nations, as well as individuals. When he slew them, says the bard of Judah, then they sought him, and early inquired after God; and they remembered that God was their rock and the high God their redeemer—but they soon forgot his works. This is but the character of human nature, and we have seen a full exhibition of it even within our limited experience. We can remember, when at least the better part of this nation, pressed with a sense of impending evils, bowed themselves before the altars of Jehovah, and acknowledged the truth of every sentiment which has now been advanced. We can remember again, when transported with gratitude for some singular deliverance, they filled his temples with ascriptions of victory to the God of armies. But it would not be wonderful, if the tone of the nation were now considerably changed; and did they dare to put their sentiment into language, it would probably be, "my power, and the might of my hand hath gotten me this wealth;" or if they should acknowledge the agency of God and of religious truth in carrying them through the perils of the past—yet now that they are treading the high places of the earth—now, that their name is a passport to every cabinet, and their banner a protection upon every sea—that they *now* feel their dependence upon the arm of the Almighty, as their fathers felt it, is more than we dare believe. And yet, never were they exhorted to that dependence with more reason, than exists *now*. It will be useful to remember, that the hour of Judah's wo was the hour of her pride; that the crisis of her existence, was in the period of her most confirmed security, and her most unbounded triumph; it was in the reign of Solomon, after her enemies had been entirely subdued, and her warfare fully accomplished—when the kings of Tarshish and the isles brought presents, and the kings of Sheba and Seba offered gifts; yea, when all kings fell down before her, all nations served her: then it was, that the seed was sown, which sprung up in all her future wars, captivities and desolations; then it was, that she was guilty of that horrible departure from God, which was punished in the very next generation, by the division of her tribes—which was followed by an interminable train of dissensions and jealousies, and left her at last the most abased and afflicted among the nations. May the God of mercy avert a similar fate from our own now favoured and exalted land! But if ever there was a people exposed to a similar fate, it is ours. We speak not here with reference merely to our ill desert; we refer chiefly to those moral causes, which are now in such rapid and extensive operation over the body of this continent, and which must be developed, either in a destiny of unrivalled greatness, or in a doom of unexampled wrath; particularly,

We are glorying in the increase of our population and of our physical resources; and it is true, that if no change takes place in the course of

nature, before the children of some now living shall die, this country will contain two hundred millions of inhabitants; this is averred, not as the blustering of national vanity, but as the result of sober calculation.* Again, we are glorying in the freedom of our civil constitution; and it is true, that the Arab of the desert does not possess a higher consciousness of individual power, nor a broader range for its operation and exercise, than is the birth-right of every American. But now, assemble together your political diviners, and let them tell us by their enchantments, how these myriads under such a constitution, are to be held together. Or if they must be parcelled out into several governments, then let them tell us, how we are to escape that flood of revolutionary horrors, which has desolated the fields of Europe—how we are to save this continent from becoming what every other continent has been, a slaughter-house of nations—how we are to preserve our children from military vassallage, and our land from soaking with carnage; in a word, by what process it is, that whilst in every other country, and in every other age, civilized and barbarous, man has proved the natural foe of his fellow-man, and nations have been but bands of rival gladiators; by what process it is, that in these ends of the world, they are to become of one heart and of one way.—As man ever has been, such a result is impossible. Nothing can save us but the favour of Him, who can cover us with the shadow of his hand, whilst he deals round the cup of trembling among his adversaries. Nothing can save us but walking in the policy of our fathers; establishing it as the ordinance of our land, from Maine to Mississippi, and from the Atlantick to the Rocky mountains, that our children shall HOPE IN GOD, AND NOT FORGET THE WORKS OF GOD, BUT KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS.

* Dr. Rice's Miss. Sermon.

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